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## MUSIC.

## THE SYMPHONY CONCERTS.

THE fourth of the Symphony Concerts given by Mr. Theodore Thomas at Steinway Hall drew such an audience as in former years could never be attracted to any regular musical performance except under the auspices of the Philharmonic Society. It included not only that small but warmly appreciative circle of connoisseurs who have long been among the most enthusiastic admirers of Mr. Theodore Thomas, and the most constant attendants at his concerts (most of them coming with free tickets), but also the more brilliant and more remunerative representatives of fashion and fine society, who have at last resolved that Mr. Thomas shall be taken up and patronized. Their favors are tardy, but they are welcome. The programme on the evening of which we speak (the 1st of February) opened with Schumann's beautiful Third Symphony in E flat—the "Cologne Symphony," as it is commonly known to musicians. Some have imagined it to be a sort of panorama of the Rhine, and have found in each of its movements a representation of some scene on the banks of the beautiful river. Schumann did not amuse himself with the follies of "programme music," which needs a page of text to interpret every page of the score; nor did he attempt to express in melody and harmonic combinations thoughts which can only be uttered in written language or painted forms. He knew, as all great composers have known, that a musical thought can be perpetuated only in music; there is no equivalent for it to be found in words, and similarly music cannot be made to describe scenes which are properly addressed only to the eye. Yet he frequently recognized the value of what we call descriptive music; that is to say, music which suggests certain picturesque scenes, not by imitation, but by mere association of ideas. Such is the "Cologne Symphony." In the broad and majestic harmonies of the opening allegro it is not difficult to imagine that he had in mind the onward movement of flowing waters; in the scherzo we can trace the suggestions of rustic merriment, and the simple and vigorous songs of a happy peasantry; in the tender strains of the andante we seem to float by the purpling vineyard, and fields of waving grain, and gardens bright with flowers and the song of birds: then we pass by the old cathedral city, and the sacred chant mingles with the music of the waves and the voiceless psalm of Nature. It is a grand work, never surpassed since Beethoven, save once, perhaps, by Schumann himself. Strong, hearty, healthy music like this seems to accord remarkably well with Mr. Thomas's temper of mind, and he gave it a magnificent interpretation. We have spoken at some length in previous articles of the perfect training and admirable composition of his band. These merits were especially conspicuous in the "Cologne Symphony," and they were greatly enhanced by the remarkable spirit with which the conductor himself took hold of his work. The best of players do not often give so sympathetic a performance.

Two other works on this fourth programme illustrated the style of descriptive music which is supposed by many critics to be much in advance of Schumann. The first is Liszt's "Orpheus"—one of the long series of "symphonic poems" which includes the more familiar "Mazeppa" and "Les Préludes." Whatever may be thought of the Music of the Future, there is one point in which the poem is certainly inferior to the symphony. Schumann's work can be thoroughly enjoyed without reference to its association with the river Rhine; but the "Orpheus" is unintelligible without explanation from the programme. Liszt's purpose, as he states it himself, was to represent the softening and ennobling influence of art—"art, which pours its melodious waters as a soothing balm over the contradictory elements wrangling in the heart of man." "Could we completely embody our thoughts," he continues, "we would portray the serene and ethical character which radiates from every work of art; the sweet energy, the august empire, with which it rules us; the gentle undulations like Elysian zephyrs, which, like a cloud of incense, shall pour themselves around and envelop the universe in a flood of eternal and mysterious harmony." This, like nearly all of Liszt's symphonic poetry, is vague, and attempts what is impossible; but it is poetry, and, in spite of occasional overstraining, is generally pleasing and soothing. The wandering strains are always beautiful; the most fantastic passages are always sweet and harmonious. The use of two harps produces an exquisite effect; and the full harmonies brought out by the entire strength of the band at the close are in the composer's richest and grandest vein.

The second of the works of the new school, presented at this concert, was the Introduction to Wagner's "Meistersinger von Nürnberg." It has been played many times in New York since its production a few years ago: but it can hardly have seemed very clear to those who neither had the advantage of an explanatory programme nor were acquainted with the opera to which it serves as overture. It has generally impressed people as a rich but grotesque piece of musical extravagance. In reality it is the fitting prelude to scenes of popular festival and enjoyment, and the magnificence of mediæval processions. The jovial Hans Sachs is a prominent figure on the stage. The jolly burgher, the adventurous knight, the minstrels, the guilds, all take part in this highly colored representation of a German holiday. Knowing something of the drama, we can understand and enjoy the curious and ingenious *verspiel* to a composition in which the drama and the music are so inseparably united. Wagner, with all his dramatic talent, has no capacity for humor, and when he attempts to illustrate it he only becomes grotesque. Hence, in this piece, there is one surprising deficiency: the music is not humorous; it is not even sprightly. Wagner gives us the turmoil without the fun, the bustling movement and gay dresses, and flaming banners, without the real spirit of merriment.

There was one other composition for the orchestra, Beethoven's "Coriolanus" overture, and one solo piece, the Chopin Concerto in F minor, played by Miss Anna Mehlig. This wonderful work tests the intelligence and good taste of the pianist more closely than almost any other work in the modern *répertoire*. It abounds in delicate beauties which a dull or a hasty player would be certain of missing. It presents a wonderful variety of graces, requiring quick discernment and unflinching delicacy of touch. The adagio especially is a poem which none but a true artist can fully understand. Miss Mehlig's performance ought to have satisfied the most exacting critic. She gave a very graceful and refined reading of the

work, bringing out its delicacies—not all of them, perhaps, for it is a concerto in which almost every new player will find some new thought—and throwing into the appropriate places much more force than she usually displays. For this she deserves a high compliment. It is a common mistake of pianists to play Chopin with too light a finger, as if his music were nothing but pretty fancies and eccentric phrases. The composer himself loved to hear his works executed with a vigorous hand, and when he was too far wasted with disease to interpret them properly himself, he used to beg his friends to give them the strength of touch of which he was no longer capable.

## THE PHILHARMONIC SOCIETIES.

The novelty at the third concert of the New York Philharmonic Society was the *Hirtengesang*, or "Pastoral" from Liszt's new oratorio of "Christus." The programme gave no explanation of the part which this movement fills in the general scheme of the oratorio, but its name is sufficiently suggestive, and the pastoral character is unmistakable. It opens with a beautiful and simple melody played at first by the reeds alone, and this leads into a superb religious. Nothing but the most intense prejudice against Liszt and all his works and ways, could blind one to the nobleness of this composition. It is exquisitely poetic in sentiment, while in treatment it is a marvel of scientific skill. Yet how differently the older masters would have constructed such a work! Sebastian Bach or Handel would have reached the end which Liszt proposed to himself by the simplest possible succession of musical phrases. The composer of "Christus" simulates rustic simplicity by means of the most intricate and elaborate network of parts, and never goes at an object directly when he can reach it by devious ways. Which is the truer school of composition, we leave the philosophic critic to determine. For our part, we find in the plain, honest methods of the antiquated composers a power to stir the feelings which is not in the complicated and ingenious structures of the new lights. The other works produced at the same concert were Schumann's difficult Second Symphony (C major); the "Oberon" overture; the Chopin concerto, in F minor, played by Mr. S. B. Mills; and Mozart's violin concerto in D, played by Madame Camilla Urso, who returns to New York after a long absence in Europe, California, and elsewhere. The symphony was only pretty well played. The two concertos were admirable, but in each there was a conspicuous fault. Madame Urso is too much in the habit of rasping the strings, and she yielded to this infirmity to an extraordinary degree on the occasion of which we write. Mr. Mills is not in the habit of making faults of any kind, and the trouble in his case was one over which he had no control. The orchestra we fear had not rehearsed with him sufficiently, and seemed to need a good deal of coaxing and correction. In order, we suppose, that the conductor might be face to face with both the pianist and the leaders of the band, Mr. Bergmann stood by the side of the piano, and the lid, instead of being raised, was entirely removed from the instrument. There being nothing to reflect the sound, a great deal of the piano part was consequently lost in the vast spaces of the Academy. What a difference there was when Miss Mehlig played the same work under much more favorable conditions at Steinway Hall, where Mr. Thomas boldly turned his back upon her, and led his orchestra through the difficult work without a mistake—we had almost said without a fault!

The Brooklyn Philharmonic Society is composed of the same material as the sister association in New York, and has the same conductor, and yet its concerts are generally somewhat inferior, not only in the programmes but in the execution. The third of the season, given on the 8th of February, was interesting for the production of an important orchestral work by an American composer. This work was Mr. George F. Bristow's "Arcadian Symphony." It is named in compliment to the Arcadian Club, of New York, and not in reference to that mythical land of poetry and happiness which has so often been the inspiration of song and music. Indeed, it is descriptive of quite another sort of land, for it takes us with an emigrant train across the prairies and mountains of the far West, and introduces an Indian war dance, very quaint and striking, and likely to become popular. The orchestra also played Beethoven's Trio, opus 97, instrumented for the full band by Liszt, and Litolff's "Robespierre" overture.

## MISCELLANEOUS CONCERTS.

An excellent concert was given at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, recently, for the benefit of Mr. Sigismund Lasar. Unlike testimonial concerts in general, it was good all through. The Thomas orchestra played eight or ten pieces, including the andante of the "Pastoral Symphony," Gluck's "Iphigenia in Aulis" overture, and Raff's "Dame Kobold" overture. Mr. S. B. Mills played the second and third movements of the Chopin concerto in F minor (no one can complain that that work has been neglected this season); and Mr. Lasar's daughter sang Mendelssohn's "In-felice," the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria," and an encore ballad. This young lady has but recently come before the public as a vocalist, and is taking a high place in the profession. One of the public concerts of the German Liederkreis was given not long ago at the club rooms, in Fourth Street, when Mozart's Requiem Mass was sung with considerable effect, the choruses naturally being much better than the solos. The Requiem was preceded by a miscellaneous concert, in which Miss Antonia Henne, Mr. F. Bergner, Mr. Carl Spiegler, the German bass, and the male chorus of the society participated. There was also a performance of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony, under the direction of Mr. Agricol Paur. In former years an amateur orchestra, reinforced by a few professional artists, has taken part in the concerts of the Liederkreis, but on this occasion we believe the players were all professional. If the effect of their performance was not all that could have been desired, this was in great measure owing to the room, which is too small for an orchestra. The Onslow Quintette has begun its second season with fair promise. The associates this year are Philip and Louis Faerber, (violins), Fidelis Zitterbart (viola), Bernhard Bierlich (violin-cello), and Caryl Florio (piano). Mr. Richard Hoffman has resumed his choice classical soirees at Chickering Hall—charming little concerts in which a pretty little room, a brilliant little audience, and the cheerful faces of appreciative friends make fitting concomitants to an elegant and refined performance.

## ART.

## THE EXHIBITION OF WATER COLORS.

THE Sixth Winter Exhibition of the American Society of Painters in Water Colors, which has just closed, was one to be remembered. It was the first in which the Society was ever pitted against English Painters of the same school, and was consequently the first which enabled us to arrive at any definite conclusion in regard to the merits and demerits of both. For the English portion of the Exhibition we were indebted to Mr. Henry Blackburn, of London, formerly editor of *London Society*, who wished to establish a friendly understanding between the painters of England and America, with a view to a common exhibition of the works in both in future. Whether he will succeed remains to be seen, but we fear not. If he fails it will be because we know little or nothing of the art of painting in water colors, and because most of our painters are in the same predicament. We ought not to be censured, since the art is new to us, and they ought not to be censured, we suppose, since it is equally new to them. They have practiced it but a few years, while English artists have practiced it for a long time.

The English collection contained one hundred and thirty-three pictures in water colors, and seventy-one sketches in India ink, pen drawings, etchings, etc. Let us recall some of them, while they are fresh in our recollection, and the characteristics of the artists by whom they were painted, who, for the most part, are unknown to us. First and foremost, we recall "Prague" and "Brunswick," two architectural views by Skinner Prout, which were masterly. Beside these we place "The Long Picture Gallery, Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire," an admirable interior by Collingwood Smith. The same artist was also represented by "The Garden of the Tuileries, Paris," "The Old Tower and Bridge, Lucerne," "A Ruined Vineyard, Savona," and "The Tête Noire, near Chamounix," four pictures in as many different walks of art, any one of which would make the reputation of an American painter. There were several delicious landscapes by Marion Croft, of which the best, perhaps, was "Monk's Run, Lincoln," a bright, warm glimpse of woodland scenery. Two of the most covetable pictures in the whole collection were an "Old Farm, Worcestershire," and "A Warwickshire Field-path," by Harry Baker, which were handled with great freedom and breadth of effect. A "Druid Circle near Keswick," by S. H. Baker, was a happy rendering of light and shadow. Among the marine pieces to be remembered, the finest was by George L. Hall. An illustration of the line,

"And the hollow ocean ridges roaring unto cataracts,"

it took in at once the roll of the waves, the mist driving before the wind, and the sudden clearing up of the sky. The collection was not rich in flower and fruit pieces, though it contained a number of good examples of both, the finest being some little still-life studies, by William Hough, one of which, a tiny "Bird's Nest," was dainty enough to have adorned Titania's bower. The gem of the whole collection, however, was "The Christmas Pudding," by W. L. Thomas—a picture of a young girl and a little child, richly and harmoniously colored, and imbued with exquisite feeling.

The American collection contained two hundred and seventy water colors, and eighty-four pictures and sketches in pencil, India ink, drawings on wood, etchings, etc. It presented examples of the style and manner of the best known water-color painters of America, and, it is reasonable to suppose, presented most of them at their best. If it did not, it ought to have done so, and we shall speak of it as if it did. Mr. Louis C. Tiffany was represented by eight pictures: Mr. A. F. Bellows by seven; Mr. W. T. Richards, of Philadelphia, by seven; Mr. R. Swain Gifford by five; and Mr. J. D. Smillie, the President of the Society, by two. The majority of Mr. Tiffany's pictures consisted of Oriental scenes and figures, similar to those that he paints in oil colors, of which, by the way, they strongly reminded us. We recall two of his Moorish figures which struck us, and which were painted with great vigor. His best architectural view was probably the "Mosque of Said Pacha, Alexandria." The pictures of Mr. Bellows were characterized by sweetness. They were mostly bits of wood and water scenery, and were nicely painted: the foliage was light and airy, and the water reasonably transparent. Nowhere was there any indication of strength, either in expression or reserve, but everything

"Was turned to favor and to prettiness."

Mr. Gifford's pictures reminded us of Mr. Tiffany's, chiefly, we suppose, because they were Oriental scenes. They were rendered by a different and lighter method than that practiced by Mr. Tiffany, and they reminded us less of oil paintings. Six of Mr. Richards's pictures were views of mountain scenery in New England, the seventh being a "Coast Scene." They were painted with great care, and were faithful to Nature, as Mr. Richards sees it; their effect was at once tender and strong, yet—we fail to recall them. Mr. Smillie's best picture, "Study from Nature, in the Adirondacks," was strongly painted, and more harmonious in coloring than his dashing "Scene in the Yosemite, Horse Racing." The pictures of Mrs. Elizabeth Murray (who contributed three or four to the English collection) were—we suppose we ought to say, vigorous. The frequenters of the National Academy know what they were, for they have seen scores of her pictures there before now. Her "Gold Picture of the Mother of Christ" inspired no reverence in us, whatever it may have done in others. The pictures of Mr. A. T. Bricher evinced delicate feeling, and a pure sense of color; but, with one or two exceptions, they lacked originality: in other words, they were too academical. The little flower-pieces of Miss E. Bridges were exquisite, which is more than can be said of the multitude of flower-pieces which our water-color artists insist on painting and exhibiting, and of which there was more than a sufficiency in this Exhibition. Of marine pieces we recall the "Coast of France," by Mr. F. M. H. de Haas, and "Stormy Weather on Massachusetts Coast," by Mr. Edward Moran; of figure pieces, "Hard Times," and "Seed Corn," two faithful sketches of country character, by Mr. T. W. Wood; "The Mother," by Mr. Eastman Johnson (it is not a water-color, however), and "The Rival Florists," by Mr. E. K. Johnson. The face and figure of the girl in white, in the last, are simply exquisite. This picture, however, which was the best of the collection, was not painted by an American artist.